THIS IS OUR LIFE

Barry continues writing for you—telling you in his own words the story of The Bee Gees.

BY BARRY GIBB

MUST start off this week by telling you about Colin Petersen, the drumming Bee Gee. I MUST start with him because it's a matter of self-preservation—you should see some of the threatening letters I get 'cos he and Vince Melouney have hardly been in the story so far.

Still, in fairness to me, I've found the best way to tell a story is to start at the beginning and go through the middle on to the end. At the beginning of last year, there were only three Bee Gees, the Gibb brothers. But once we'd persuaded Bob Stigwood that we were good enough to deserve a helping hand, we started thinking about augmenting the group to get a fuller sound going. We needed a drummer and we all immediately thought of good old Colin.

Everybody was calling us the 'group from Australia' at this time, with no hit record to boost our egos, but really only Colin was a fully-fledged and paid-up Aussie—he was born in Kinearoy, Queensland, and was a familiar old face round the Aussie show-business scene. For Colin was your actual FILM STAR! To us, film stars were VIP characters and we'd seen him in his biggest hit, which was *Smiley*, the story of a cheeky little lad. Type-casting, really, because Colin IS a cheeky little lad!

But from acting, he'd got involved with a group, Steve and the Board, a sort of King Brothers' act and they'd been on telly quite a lot 'down under'. But he had ambitions to make it in Britain, which made four of us. He arrived here virtually penniless. Only natural, then, that we'd link up. Said Colin: "I'd like to work with you. But I won't half be cross if the whole scene goes down the drain . . ."

A good nut, Colin, because he really had worked at making a name for himself. We used to talk long into the night about how he'd started playing drums when he was five, barely able to see over the bass-drum. He'd had lessons, too, which put him one up on us. We knew he was good, because he often sat in on sessions with us in Australia—and we knew he was a good nut because he wouldn't take any money for them!

That film *Smiley* was a right old tear-jerker and it took a fortune at the box-office. But poor old Colin got less than £400 for his leading role. That's the dodgy thing about being a real kid in show-business—there's always someone hanging around to make a mug out of you. Mind you, Colin had acting in his blood, so he didn't care too much. Besides, it led to parts with Richard Attenborough in *The Scamp*, which was also type-casting, and Max Bygraves in *A Cry From The Streets*.

He stopped filming when he was twelve and switched to music. Ever heard of Gene Krupa? Well, he's rated one of the top drummers in the world and when he went to Australia on a visit he wound up playing on the same show with Colin. What's more, Gene Krupa was very impressed . . .

So now there were four of us and to be honest things didn't seem to be moving very fast. What was important was getting a hit record and we did have *Spicks and Specks*, which eventually made it to number one in Australia. But here, despite some useful air plays, it didn't register. In fact, there was a right old plugging scene going on round this record, but we knew it wouldn't work. If the fans don't buy it after about 300 plays on radio, well . . . the fault's with the record, not with the fans.

We had a few more of our now familiar 'panic meetings'. That's where we all get round a table and try to work out where we were going wrong. I hate sounding so pessimistic so far in this story, but at this stage we'd had more kicks than ha'pence, as they say. We were spending a lot of time at Polydor Records these days, with Bob Stigwood and with company boss Roland Rennie—Mr. Rennie kept telling us to be patient and assured us that our break would come. Oh, yeah? How come, then, that so many groups with no experience at all were crashing through into the charts—that's what WE wanted to know.

One thing, though, was that we weren't short of original material to sing. Back in Australia, the three Gibbs had written so many numbers that we'd completely lost count of them. Sometimes we'd find old scraps of paper with lyrics scribbled on them—who knows, but if we could find them all now we might earn ourselves a fortune.

But we were always looking for new ideas. One which came to us, out of the blue—out of the black, actually, because we were sitting around one night on a staircase at Polydor—was *New York Mining Disaster, 1941.* **There wasn't such a disaster, as far as we knew, but it was just the idea of people being buried underground and having little contact with the outside world. Pretty grim sort of idea for a song? Well, y-e-s! But it sure changed OUR world. More about that next week, though.**

The Bee Gees (l to r) Robin Gibb, Colin Petersen, Maurice Gibb, Barry Gibb, Vince Melouney.